

Breakout Session Record

Amanuensis: Melissa L. Rickman

Date: 13 July 2005

Institution: Natural History Museum

Title of Breakout session: 'Entomological illustration and specimens'

Names of Breakout session leaders: Julie Harvey, Janice Neri

General themes discussed at the Breakout session:

Insect study in the 16th century for those making images in conjunction with collecting.

Object Information 1

Description: 2 trays of pinned insect specimens: Butterfly tray # 8974 and Beetle tray #1

no date

The **significance** of this object is to keep us connected to the actual objects involved with the images to be discussed. It is important to note that, during the early modern period, these insects were a distinct contrast to what had been seen before as they were from the New World. Although we have the insects, there is no accompanying information concerning their life cycle or food sources even now.

The **questions** from the audience:

How were these insects chosen for collection? Insects would have been chosen for their diversity, noticed because of their color, selected for European collectors, and investigated and collected for their commercial value. In the 16th century, the aim was encyclopedic, to have an example and identification of everything. As the century continued, the commercial aspect of insects grew in importance. One example is the cochineal beetle that was used for dye.

How long have insects images been used in clothing? Images of insects have been used for thousands of years. Some of the earliest are images of the scarab and cicada.

Why do some insects retain their color while other don't? Many fewer plants and certain insects retain their color longer. It has to do with the rapid degradation of pigment while the structural color remains.

It is important to compare the pinned insects in the trays as the images of insects will show no pins in their bodies.

Object Information 2

Joris Hoefnagel (1545-1601) *Archetypa studiaque patris* (Frankfurt am Main, 1592)

Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB o H.

This octavo volume is written in Latin and illustrated with copper engravings.

Where was the object **used/viewed/consumed**?

This volume was created to put forward Hoefnagel's work in the context of his patronage network with Emperor Rudolph II. At the time, there was a great interest in replicating the images of Albrecht Dürer and Hoefnagel is imitating and competing with the work of this master. These images also were often used for patterns for painting and sewing.

The **significance** of the object?

This treatise is very complex. We will only be able to touch on the highlights. The title page examines the brevity of life. There are important icons on this page. There is an hourglass, reminding us of the shortness of our time, a snake consuming its tail, referring to eternity, day and night from the presence of an angel and bat wing in the image, as well as icons of the seasons, the image of God in the center with the mimicry of man in the image of a monkey nearby.

The **questions** from the audience:

Tell us about the coloring and printing of this volume? This work is a rare colored version. It was colored contemporaneously. It has a royal warrant for printing on the title page. This was a type of early copyright.

Some of these images in the text itself are riddles, aren't they? The images within this volume are reflections upon the subtleties of language and, yes, there are riddles. There are quotes from the Bible, Erasmus, and even from Hoefnagel himself. The riddles involve both image and word. In one image, [shown during the session] there is the quote "Birth, Suffering, and Death" with references to the ideas of more haste and less speed. There are the images of the snail and butterfly that were thought to go through perfect metamorphosis with the resurrection of the adult from the pupa. It was thought to be similar to the cycle of human life. Other pages show Hoefnagel's sense of humor. In another image, [shown during the session] it is written "All men are eaten by flies." There are visual puns too. The insect wings repeat the shape of the lily petals, there is the reflection of form between the splayed frog and the monstrous apple. There are also subtle shifts in perspective that make it uncertain about where the plane of the page exists. In many of the pictures, there are drawn flowers suspended in brackets at the sides of the page. Again and again, Hoefnagel shows art and nature working together and through human hands, nature is made better.

Object Information 3

Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) *De animalibus insectis libri septem* (Bologna 1602)

Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB q F.

This volume is a velum quarto.

The **questions** from the audience:

How did they use the illustrations? There were many drawings of specimens. These images were as a virtual specimen cabinet. Aldrovandi put the images in a grid like formation on the page. The manuscripts are extant still and are not the same as what is in the presented volume. It was through moving images to change groupings that the images in this volume were created. In many cases, the wood block itself was broken and shifted about to accommodate the new categorization.

Are all the images life size? Yes, most of the time.

What sources did he use? Aldrovandi used general natural histories and ancient sources such as Pliny.

Was he in communication with others? Yes, there was a correspondence network that existed. He specifically selected particular German and Flemish artists for him image work.

Object Information 4

Thomas Moffett (1553-1604) *Insectorum sive minimorum animalium theatrum* (London 1634) Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB q M.4.

This volume is a velum quarto.

Original **context** of the object?

This work began with the work of Gesner. It was given to Thomas Penny who worked with Moffett. Finally, after Moffett's death, his assistant published the work. The manuscript is in the British Library. Moffett continued the correspondence networks created around the work before he received it. He refers to Camerarius sending information to Penny, specifically sending a "shape." It is interesting to think about why this specific word is used. In this situation, the shape seems to be a copy of a rhinoceros beetle.

Object Information 5

Georg Flegel (1566-1638) Watercolour studies, including insects (c1622) Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB q F.

Description: Quarto bound watercolours. Specific examination of the stag beetle taken from the Dürer images and the Burnet moth.

The **significance** of the object?

This is a working collection of drawings. Flegel was well known for his use of light and utensils in his still lives and insect drawings. The images were necessary to understand the life cycle. The stag beetle was important because there seemed to be no need for a male and female and so they were likened to God. Here is an image of a Burnet moth with odd antennae. They seem fake. Here is a very detailed image of caterpillar head and a larval image and one section viewed very closely.

The **questions** from the audience:

The border for these images seems unusual in this volume. Was it a common device? The green border was part of the original context put in the volume. It isn't known if the volume was originally one or more parts. This collection is absolutely unique but not heavily researched.

Object Information 6

Robert Hooke (1635-1704) *Micrographia : or, Some physical descriptions of minute bodies made by magnifying glasses, with observations and enquiries thereupon* (London 1665) Location: NHM. General Library.

The **significance** of the object?

Here are the centerfolded image of the flea, the fly eye, and the louse. Hooke struggled to prepare the insects to be viewed. The images are unambiguous and clean, however. The insects are not shown pulled apart but as a whole. Hooke has translated his observations into a whole entity. He also seems to be very sympathetic to the images. In this image of a louse, the arms seem almost human. His sympathy was known from the time he recoiled from performing a dog vivisection. Dr. Neri stated that she had found a sketch in one of Hooke's notebooks of his early observations that appears in this text.

The **questions** from the audience:

How does he represent himself in the images and notes? The images are poetic, pastoral, and scholarly portrayals while the textual notes are brief observations.

How many copies are there of this work? There are many on the market today.

Object Information 7

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717) *M.S. Gräffin...Neues Blumenbuch allen kunstverständigen Liebhabern zu Lust, Nutz und Dienst mit Fleiss verfertiget* (Nuremberg 1680) Location: NHM. Botany Library SB 635.9 MER Q.

The **significance** of the object?

This volume comes from her early life and although it focuses on needlework and textile patterns, it is still considered a scientific work. She clearly expresses that her flower works were for needlework. This can be seen in that there were certain design principles that made them easy to follow. An example of this can be seen in the space around the image and the clear openings within the image that facilitated translation into inlay and needlework. Merian was very involved in the community of natural history collectors and collections. Within this context, she learned how to preserve and show natural objects.

Object Information 8

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717) *Metamorphosis insectorum surinamensium* (Amsterdam 1795) Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB f. M.

This volume is a grand folio.

The **significance** of the object?

In the 18th century, some of Merian's images show up in textiles.

The **questions** from the audience:

Why was this book made? Is it scientific? In this work, Merian had the patron in mind, such as Levinus Vincent. Perhaps her observations were not scientific in nature but her observations were made with a clear distinct style and purpose. This volume probably came to Babbington and copies were made by a footman to entertain. Copies were made and color information for the plates exists within in the text.

Object Information 9

Levinus Vincent. *Wondertooneel der nature* (Amsterdam 1706) Location: NHM. General Library 4qVIN.

Object Information 10

James Barbut (fl.1777) *A collection of British insects drawn from nature* (c.1777) reproduced in The Genera Insectorum of Linnaeus. Location: NHM. Entomology Library SB q. B. 1.

The **questions** from the audience:

What was the purpose for these watercolours? These images are watercolours following Linnaeus. Embroidery was sometimes used as an image frame. An embroidery pattern would be self-coloured such as white on white from the shape. The silhouette would be first. The color change reduction at this time was normal. Why is it used here?